

A Celebration of the Family –

Observance of the Tenth Anniversary

of the

International Year of the Family

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Introduction

Ten years ago, the United Nations General Assembly declared 1994 the International Year of the Family to call attention to the foundational role the institution of the family plays in human civilization. This year marks the tenth anniversary of that celebration, and provides another opportunity for nations and societies around the globe to reaffirm and recognize the irreplaceable role the family plays in the health, development, and well-being of children, adults, and the communities in which they live.

The United States welcomes this international effort to strengthen the foundation of an ancient but still vital social institution. Indeed, President George W. Bush has kept the family central to both his domestic and foreign policy. He recognizes the family “as a source of help, hope, and stability,” and has repeatedly stated that his Administration is committed to strengthening the family. Not only has he called upon Americans “to honor the family,” but he also maintains that a vital role of government is to “protect institutions in our society.” The family is one social institution that needs our collective protection.

This report highlights the necessity of the family as a social institution, explores the relationship between the family and the state, and offers principles that should guide a prudent family policy. It discusses how national and local governments can help families in direct and tangible ways, including by strengthening marriage and providing support to children from every family situation. The report also suggests that indirect measures also are necessary if governments wish to help families in the long-term. Those indirect

measures include strengthening the family as a social institution, respecting the family as a self-governing entity, and taking steps to allow the family to thrive within society.

The Bush Administration submits this report on the situation and policy in the United States to the nations of the world in the spirit of goodwill, cooperation, and friendship to mark the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. But discussion of the family among the nations of the world is more than just an academic exercise. The Administration hopes for a strengthening of the family in our time, not just for the sake of the millions of children whose well-being depends upon it, but also for the future course of the human family in general.

Why Families Matter

The United States Census Bureau defines a family as “two or more persons related by birth, marriage or adoption who reside in the same household.” Of course, this definition cannot begin to capture the richness of family life in the United States — celebrating anniversaries, wiping runny noses, caring for an elderly parent, practicing spelling lessons, tucking in one’s children to sleep, and kissing one’s spouse goodnight. In contrast to the sometimes-surreal world of professional life, one economist once observed, “The real world is the world around the kitchen table, the world of the nursery, the world of the bedroom.”

Claiming that the family matters is not simply an appeal to sentiment. Political philosophers, social historians, and civic and religious leaders throughout the ages have praised the family as the foundation of the social order, the bedrock of a nation, and the bastion of civilization. Cicero, for example, spoke of the family as “the first society” and “the seedbed of the state.” The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations (UN) describes the family as “the natural and fundamental group unit of society.”

The family is a universal and irreplaceable community, rooted in human nature, that is the basis for all societies at all times. As the cradle of life and love for each new generation, the family is the primary source of personal identity, self-esteem, and support for children. It is also the first and foremost school of life, uniquely suited to teach children integrity, character, morals, responsibility, service, and wisdom. As the UN Programme for the International Year of the Family (1994) states, the family provides:

the natural framework for the emotional, financial, and material support essential to the growth and development of its members, particularly infants and children. . . . The family remains a vital means of preserving and transmitting cultural values.

These roles of transmitting culture and socializing children make the family indispensable to civil society, as families transform helpless, dependent babies into responsible, independent adults.

Two of America's founding fathers, John Adams and John Witherspoon, expressed particular appreciation for these "effects" of the family—and called the family "the seedbed of virtue" and the bedrock of civil society. Over a century later, President Theodore Roosevelt claimed that there is "no finer factory of individual character" than the family, which he also viewed as the wellspring of citizenship. More recently, President George W. Bush said that the character of the nation "begins in the home," as the family "is largely responsible for the development of character, morals, responsibility, and wisdom."

The Relationship of Marriage to the Family

Despite its well-documented decline, the institution of marriage remains central to family life. Indeed, by bringing together two people in a lifelong bond, marriage creates new families. Marriage also links existing families in a manner that invigorates and

perpetuates both. Marriage weaves ties of belonging between the couple, their parents and extended kin, their anticipated children, and society at large.

While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that “men and women of full age ... have the right to marry and to found a family,” marriage is not so much about rights, but responsibilities. The married couple sets a pattern of sacrifice, duty, and obligation that naturally flows into parental duties of raising and nurturing children.

The Family and the Common Good

The commitment and reciprocal responsibilities in marriage benefit society by helping to create stable homes for children. Children are more likely to enjoy warm, enduring relationships with their parents when their parents themselves sustain warm, enduring relationships with each other. Empirical studies consistently indicate that, while many factors influence child development, growing up within the context of a healthy marriage decreases the risk that children will suffer from emotional or behavioral problems, be victims of abuse or neglect, and struggle in school.

Adults also benefit from healthy and stable marriages. Married adults tend to live longer, healthier lives. Married mothers suffer from lower rates of depression than their single counterparts. Married couples enjoy higher incomes and lower living costs, and save more money and accumulate more wealth, than their unmarried counterparts. Healthy marriages and healthy families are good for children, adults, and the nation.

Modern Pressures on the Family

During the last century, families have faced unprecedented challenges, both political and cultural. From ideologies that seek to supplant familial devotion with political devotion, to cultural trends that emphasize adult desires over children’s needs, the family has suffered from a range of social pressures.

By their very nature, totalitarian movements seek to subsume familial devotion to devotion to the state. Every totalitarian movement of the twentieth century, from communism to Nazism, sought to weaken families. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) reported in 2001 that these types of ideologies, which viewed the family suspiciously, overestimated the capacity of the state to “rescue” children who are living in precarious environments. As a result, these societies too often relied upon state-sponsored institutions to care for children, often to the exclusion of empowering families to care for their own children themselves, in their own homes.

In the last generation, by contrast, the pressures on the family appear to have come less from political forces and more from cultural changes in the West. By the late-1970s, cultural voices emerged that questioned the utility of the family and marital commitment to the needs of children. As a result, at least in part, marriage rates declined over the past four decades, while rates of divorce, unwed childbearing, and cohabitation increased. While many of these trends stabilized over the 1990s, currently one-third of births in the United States are to unmarried parents. Of the remaining two-thirds of children born to married parents, a projected 40 percent will see their mother and father divorce. In some communities, a staggering 70 percent of births are to unmarried parents. The consequences for the health and well-being of the children and the community cannot be underestimated or understated. Such data strongly suggest that the condition of U.S. families and even families around the world needs strengthening now more than ever.

The Family and the State

Given the important role that families play in society, does the state have any role in supporting the family? We believe the answer is yes. Government, within appropriate limits, should work to support and strengthen families. This support falls into three broad categories – respecting the prerogatives of families, proactive support for healthy marriages, and supporting all families that need assistance.

To support families effectively, government must recognize that families exist apart from the state. The U.S. Declaration of Independence indicates that all human beings are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, in other words, rights that predate the state. The state can only recognize and acknowledge these rights. In the same manner, the family is a gift that the state should not deny or manipulate for its own purposes. The state must recognize and respect the family for what it is, as a matter of fundamental moral and natural law. By intruding on the prerogatives of the family or ignoring the decline of the family, the state weakens its very foundation. The state's foremost obligation in this sphere is to respect, defend, and protect the family as an institution. As President George W. Bush has said, the state should "honor the family."

The state should proactively strengthen the family for a number of reasons. By shoring up the family as an institution, the state strengthens the foundation of civil society. When civil society is weak, citizens feel less connected to others and more subject to the whims of a politicized and conflicted world beyond their control.

The state should aim to strengthen families because stronger families mean higher levels of well-being among the rising generation. A significant number of today's children and youth are struggling -- they suffer from unacceptably high levels of emotional distress, behavioral problems, and mental illness. Even with all the added social and psychological services directed to the young, too many remain anxious and depressed, symptoms associated with unacceptably high rates of suicide, substance abuse, and a number of physical ailments. Children and youth desperately want and need loving families.

The proactive role extends to strengthening and supporting healthy marriages. As President George W. Bush has stated, "Strong marriages and stable families are incredibly good for children, and stable families should be the central goal of American welfare policy." Specifically, strengthening the family means encouraging greater love and loyalty between all family members, and especially promoting loving, faithful, and healthy marriages. It also means encouraging increased connection and communication

between parents and children, as well as encouraging involvement of both fathers and mothers in rearing children in a positive and healthy environment and in teaching them the values and morals essential to personal achievement and the good of society.

Finally, while the state should support healthy marriages, the state must also support all families that need assistance. Even if government policy does what it can to strengthen healthy marriages, many children will grow up in other less-than-ideal situations.

Research indicates that these children tend to face increased risks for negative outcomes and have greater needs for social services. Therefore, the state should offer a variety of tangible social services to families in need. Such programs in the United States include cash assistance, food assistance, childcare services, and health care to help ensure that all families are provided a minimum standard of living.

Though such programs provide a safety net for many families and children, there are limits to government intervention. Social services cannot replace the natural, human relationships—especially those of involved mothers and fathers—that are ideal for children’s development. Whether support is channeled through cash assistance, in-kind transfers, or social workers, these worthwhile endeavors can only supplement what children need most -- the love and attention of their mother and father. No government program can replace families.

Principles of Family Policy

The overarching goal of American family policy is to secure and improve the well-being of children. As the well-being of children is fundamentally linked to the well-being of families, public policy thus seeks to support and strengthen families. The more the state can strengthen the family, the more the state can help ensure better outcomes for children. Looking primarily upon the family, rather than government, to improve the prospects of the next generation is rooted in “compassionate conservatism,” the cornerstone of President Bush’s domestic policy.

At the center of compassionate conservatism is the same idea that underlies our liberal democracy -- every life has dignity and worth. We know that each child has the greatest chance to realize his or her worth, and achieve his or her potential, when he or she is raised within the context of a strong family. Therefore, public policy should support all families, because each and every child deserves support. At the same time, since marriage is so foundational to strong family life, public policy should seek to ensure that greater numbers of children grow up in a loving family with their own, two married parents. To the extent U.S. public policy is successful in supporting healthy families, the United States can be successful in preventing many of the social ills that impede the healthy development of children and place strains on families and communities.

If the United States is successful in preventing many of the impediments to the healthy development of children and families, we can also obviate the need for other more costly -- and more intrusive -- interventions. For example, children who grow up in dysfunctional families are more likely to be abused and neglected. The United States has a child welfare system to investigate potential instances of abuse and neglect, and a foster care system to take care of children who are abused and neglected. Further, if effective public policy can help couples form and sustain healthy marriages, fewer children will be abused or neglected, and the result will be a reduced dependence on and need for child welfare services. Similar types of public policy could also impact nearly every U.S. social program. From child protective services to child support enforcement, from anti-poverty programs to services for runaway youth, the strains on social programs are exacerbated by the breakup of families and marriages; policies that reinforce family strengthening and support could have positive impacts.

Society must place the well-being of children first and foremost, and doing that means strengthening the family. This way, the government prudently protects, promotes, and nurtures the dignity and worth of every person.

What are the principles that ought to shape domestic policy in a way that honors and values the family?

Principle 1 – Government ought to create the conditions that allow families to thrive.

Perhaps the most effective policy measures that support or strengthen the family are indirect ones in which governments enable the family to thrive on its own and function autonomously. This principle finds support in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence.” Two indirect measures for strengthening the family follow.

Government ought to keep the tax burden on families as low as possible. According to research by the nonpartisan Brookings Institution and Urban Institute in the United States, the federal tax burden on the average American family has risen dramatically in the past 50 years. In 1955, the median-income family of four faced an average federal income tax rate of about 7 percent (representing both income and employee Social Security taxes). By 1997, that same rate had increased to 17 percent. The increase of the child tax credit, along with President Bush’s income tax-rate cuts, has actually reduced the rate to 14 percent in 2001. But this is still double the tax rate families paid just 50 years ago. It comes as no surprise that many families feel overburdened by the amount of taxes they must pay.

Governments ought to create the conditions whereby both parents do not feel pressured to be in the workplace just to make ends meet. Public policy should not presume that having two parents in the full-time paid workforce should be the ideal, especially for families with young children. Anecdotal and survey research consistently shows that parents would like to have the opportunity to spend more time with their children. It is important that public policy remain neutral as to which parent works outside the home and which parent stays home managing the household and caring for the children; that choice should be left to the couple. However, too many couples today

simply do not have this option. They are striving to be good parents by providing financially for their children, yet they also want to provide more nurturing, and emotional support. These types of responsibilities take time. Therefore, parents should at least have the option to split their roles and functions in the family if they so choose, and public policy should help to enable families with greater flexibility to address the needs of their children.

Principle 2 – Government ought to recognize the unique and irreplaceable contributions of both mothers and fathers to the lives of their children.

Research has shown that mothers and fathers, on average, tend to parent differently in at least some important ways, offering their children different skills and gifts. From the earliest days of infancy, research also shows that children respond to these differences in their parents. Both mothers and fathers make unique and irreplaceable contributions to the lives of their children.

Public policy should seek to strengthen the bonds connecting fathers to their children, while honoring the role of motherhood as an esteemed and respected institution in society. As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares, “Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.”

Principle 3 – Government ought to do what it can to strengthen healthy marriages and the two-parent family.

Many Americans hold similar views on the importance of public policies that encourage marriage and the formation of two-parent families. As scholars from the Progressive Policy Institute and the Brookings Institution of the United States have suggested, the United States must “reform policies that inadvertently promote divorce and out-of-wedlock births or discourage marriage in favor of single parenthood or cohabitation.” While policy reform is easier said than done, a critical first step is recognizing that healthy marriages matter to children and adults.

There are a number of guidelines that can inform government support for marriage. One is that healthy marriages are good for children; dysfunctional and abusive marriages are not. Hence, as a strategy for improving the well-being of children, government should promote *healthy* marriages.

Government should also not merely seek to be neutral about marriage. In a liberal democracy such as that found in the United States, government is – and should be – neutral about many things. Alternatively, the U.S. government is *not* neutral about some things like home ownership or charitable giving precisely because it can be shown that home ownership and charitable giving contribute to the common good. Similarly, while never pressuring any individual to marry, government can and should provide support for healthy marriages, because it can be shown that healthy marriages contribute to the common good. As such, removing disincentives for marriage is warranted – but that would only achieve neutrality. When it comes to something as important to society as healthy marriages, government cannot afford to simply be neutral.

Principle 4 – Because each child has dignity and worth, government must support children and families regardless of family structure.

Though we are hopeful that more children will grow up with married parents, the reality is that children need support regardless of the family situation in which they find themselves. Thus, support for healthy marriages must not come at the expense of supporting children living in other family structures. As President Bush has said, “Single mothers do amazing work in difficult circumstances, succeeding at a job far harder than most of us can possibly imagine. They deserve our respect and they deserve our support.” All children are unique gifts and have unique talents, and each and every one of them deserves support and encouragement, regardless of their family arrangement.

What Is the U.S. Government Doing to Strengthen the Family?

Following the development of U.S. family policy is the need to put these principles into practice. The Bush Administration has sought to implement these policies and principles through general initiatives that allow the family to thrive, as well as through targeted measures that support healthy marriages, strengthen responsible fatherhood, encourage sexual abstinence, and assist children in need. Because the family intersects so many areas of public policy, the following should be viewed as illustrative ways on how the U.S. government is seeking to strengthen the family in our country.

Allowing the Family to Thrive

Perhaps the President's most effective initiatives have been indirect measures that benefit families across the board. These measures include significantly lowering the tax burden on the family, while at the same time trusting families to make their own decisions in matters such as health care, education, homeownership, and workforce participation. All these measures provide greater freedom and flexibility to allow the family to thrive as a vital social institution.

The federal tax reductions of 2001, 2002, and 2003 have lessened the tax burden on U.S. families. These three pieces of legislation raised the child tax credit to \$1,000, lowered federal income tax rates across the board, and reduced the "marriage penalty" that taxed a working married couple more than if both were single. By accelerating the reduction of the federal tax burden on families that began in 1997 when the child tax credit was first introduced, these tax cuts have allowed families to keep more of what they earn. It has also helped to reduce economic pressures that often contribute to the necessity of having both parents in the paid labor force.

Other legislative initiatives provide families a larger stake in decisions that affect both children and parents. For example, *The No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 gives parents greater latitude in the choice of schools their children can attend, especially in the case

where a school does not meet acceptable standards. The *Medicare Prescription Drug Improvement and Modernization Act* of 2003 not only offers seniors greater choices when it comes to prescription drugs, but also established Health Savings Accounts for the general population, giving all families more choice and greater control over their healthcare needs. The *American Dream Downpayment Fund* and other housing initiatives are helping record numbers of families build their long-term financial security by making homeownership more accessible.

Supporting Healthy Marriages

The proposed reauthorization of welfare reform is another example. It places an even greater emphasis, relative to the 1996 law, on both work and marriage as keys to helping families escape poverty and welfare dependency. A Healthy Marriage Initiative seeks to help couples gain access to services where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages. The President has requested spending \$240 million annually on ways to integrate services for healthy marriage into existing federally sponsored welfare programs. With these funds, states, local governments, and community- and faith-based organizations could conduct public education campaigns about the importance of marriage; offer premarital education and marriage enrichment programs to help couples develop the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages; and provide targeted outreach to troubled marriages so that couples do not have to view divorce as the only alternative when they experience marital distress. An overall goal in such efforts is to increase the proportion of children growing up in healthy married households.

Another part of the Healthy Marriage Initiative is to integrate support for healthy marriages into current social service programs. For example, marriage education programs are being integrated into the child welfare system, providing marriage education to couples as a way to reduce child abuse and neglect, and to those who adopt to help ensure the success of that adoption. Funding is also targeting the development of social work curricula that include effective ways of promoting healthy marriages. And

support for healthy marriages is being integrated into services offered through the federal child support enforcement system.

As these efforts show, promoting healthy marriages requires more than just a “one-size-fits-all” approach. Different groups of people need different types of help. Thus, the United States is also targeting funds to help particularly vulnerable populations form and sustain healthy marriages. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has added marriage education to the range of social services we offer to couples that come to the United States as refugees. HHS has launched an African-American Healthy Marriage Initiative to help deal with the unique challenges facing marriages within the African-American community. And a Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative, designed to reach out to the nearly 39 million Hispanic citizens in America was recently unveiled. These and other initiatives are additive to existing social services.

Strengthening Fatherhood

Research indicates that children who grow up without involved fathers are significantly more likely to suffer emotional problems, perform poorly in school, engage in criminal activity, and abuse drugs and alcohol. Even when fathers are physically present, however, they can nonetheless be psychologically absent from the lives of their children. Government cannot ignore the role that responsible fathers play in society.

We are already integrating support for responsible, committed and involved fatherhood into existing social service programming. First, within the child support enforcement program, we have sought to increase the involvement of non-custodial parents, usually fathers, with their children. While we believe parents ought to fulfill their financial obligations to their children, and we will use all lawful means to enforce this financial obligation, we believe parental contributions to children extend far beyond just financial provision. Parents are more than paychecks. They make valuable social, emotional and psychological contributions to their children’s lives, and their children want and deserve their parents’ contributions and involvement, even when they do not live with them.

Further, some studies show that non-custodial parents who have access to their children are more likely to fulfill their child support obligations than those who do not. For these types of reasons, the U.S. Government has sought to increase the ability of responsible non-custodial parents to remain an active part of their children's lives.

We also know that parents are a critical factor in a child's early social, emotional and educational development. Thus, the Administration has undertaken a Fatherhood Initiative within the Head Start program for disadvantaged children. Through a series of grants, publications and conferences, more than 1,600 Head Start programs nationwide have been encouraged to involve fathers in unique ways to contribute to their children's early childhood development.

Encouraging Sexual Abstinence Until Marriage

The U.S. Government understands that if we are serious about ensuring that more children grow up with a mother and a father, we need to encourage adolescents to postpone sexual activity until marriage and help to reduce the rates of adolescent pregnancies.

The U.S. Government is currently funding abstinence education at a \$132 million level (fiscal year 2004). We are giving clearer messages that, all things being equal, adolescents should postpone sexual activity until marriage and avoid becoming fathers and mothers until after they are married. We need to help our young people better understand the value of waiting until they are "older" before becoming a parent, and the value of waiting until they are married.

Good choices early on pave the way for healthy families in the future. President Bush has said: "When our children face a choice between self-restraint and self-destruction, government should not be neutral. Government should not sell children short by assuming they are incapable of acting responsibly. We must promote good choices."

Assisting Children in Need

Even if we are successful in supporting healthy marriages, strengthening fatherhood and encouraging abstinence, there are still many children who will grow up without the involvement of both parents in their lives. These children include foster children waiting for adoption, children who have a parent in jail, children who have experienced their parents' divorce, and children born into single-parent families.

Currently, some 129,000 children in foster care await adoption by loving parents. For many, their lives have been an emotional roller coaster of different family placements, new schools, and sometimes separation from siblings. A firm anchor in a healthy and stable family environment can help these at-risk children.

Through the *Tax Relief Act* of 2001, the *Adoption Promotion Act* of 2003, and a new adoption website (www.adoptuskids.org), the Bush Administration has streamlined, encouraged, and accelerated the adoption process, helping more foster care children find permanent homes. Since the website was launched, over 3,000 children have found permanent placement with families. While the tax bill increased adoption tax credits, the 2003 bill extended existing financial incentives for states to increase the number of children adopted from foster care. These efforts have contributed to an increase in adoptions by 79 percent since 1996, with 51,000 children adopted out of foster care in 2002 alone.

Children of incarcerated parents represent another category of at-risk children. Having a parent in jail often leads to stress, trauma, stigmatization, and separation problems for children. Existing poverty, violence, substance abuse, and high crime environments can compound these problems. Lacking the support of families, schools and other community institutions, these children have a tougher time developing the values and social skills necessary for successful relationships. These children are also at higher risk to exhibit a range of behavioral, emotional, health and educational problems. They are

seven times more likely to become involved in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems than other children.

Unfortunately, the number of U.S. children with incarcerated parents has increased. Between 1991 and 1999, the number of children with a parent in a federal or state correctional facility more than doubled, from approximately 900,000 to approximately two million children.

Despite these outcomes and trends, there is reason for hope. Research suggests that mentors can significantly reduce the risk of negative outcomes for children. Mentoring increases the likelihood of regular school attendance and academic achievement. It also decreases the chances of engaging in self-destructive or violent behavior. A trusting relationship with a caring adult can contribute to stability and often has a profound, life-changing impact on the child. Mentoring relationships create continuing cycles of hope and promise, as they not only provide positive influences for individual children, but also strengthen families and communities.

Under President Bush a new \$450 million mentoring initiative has been initiated. Through this program, federal agencies are working with non-profit, community- and faith-based organizations to train volunteer mentors and pair them with children in need. For example, the U.S. Department of Education is helping to link one million middle-school students from disadvantaged backgrounds to adult mentors through school-based programs. In fiscal year 2004, HHS helped more than 100,000 adolescent children of prisoners find an adult mentor.

The Administration has also sought to provide support to single-parent families through a variety of policies. We know, for example, that children from single-parent families are at greater risk of being poor. As a result of welfare reform and its emphasis on helping families escape dependency through work, since 1996 the employment rate for single parents has tripled, and the child poverty rate has declined to historic lows.

In addition, the Administration has strongly supported increased funding levels to help ensure working parents have adequate access to quality child care. The Bush Administration has proposed increased amounts of child-support collections given directly to single parents, so that more single-parent families actually receive the financial support they deserve.

Children from single-parent families face a number of unique challenges. Whether it is the care of a loving mentor, the care of a loving home, or the security of economic self-sufficiency, the U.S. government has pursued a number of policies over the past few years that meet the needs of all children. Although such programs do not seek to replace or supplant parents in any way, they do try to provide consistent, caring guidance to children who need a helping hand, and support parents in a variety of family settings to nurture and provide for their children.

Valuing the Family: A Call to the Nations

The tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family provides the international community with an historic opportunity to remember and celebrate the incredible benefits of the family to the lives of children, adults and societies throughout the world. Nations and governments have a choice – they can either support these benefits, or they can neglect, challenge or suppress them. It is in the global community's best interest to advocate for stronger family support and strengthening.

In seeking to call attention to the remarkable value of the family, the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights is exemplary. This 1948 document reflects an exalted view of the family and obligates governments to respect, protect, and defend the family, with particular attention to honoring childhood and protecting parenthood.

The United States commits itself, and encourages all countries to do more to affirm and promote the institution of the family. The United States calls for the strengthening of family bonds around the world by encouraging governments and other public and private

stakeholders to promote strong and healthy marriages and increased connection and communication between parents and children. Such measures should also foster greater involvement of both fathers and mothers in rearing children in healthy and positive environments, and teaching children values and morals essential to personal achievement and the common good.

Government is one actor among many whose decisions impact the health and well-being of families. Government policy is therefore limited in what it can do to strengthen families. But what it can do, it ought to do -- to place the family as a critical component of the public policy dialogue so as to enable future generations to gain promise and hope and the best possible opportunities.

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